GROWING PAINS:

Scout-COLT Integration In the Brigade Reconnaissance Troop

by First Lieutenant Thomas P. Brennan, Jr.

When the 1st "Raider" Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized) deployed to the National Training Center in March of 1997 for the Advanced Warfighting Experiment, the rotation marked the first time ever that a visiting BCT possessed dedicated all-weather reconnaissance assets at the brigade level. Unmanned aerial vehicles and J-STARS notwithstanding, those assets came in the form of a brigade reconnaissance troop (BRT), consisting primarily of two scout platoons equipped with nine M1026 scout HMMWVs each. The troop also possessed two very special platforms, the 60-power, second-generation FLIR sight known as the Long Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System (LRAS3), and the periscope-like Hunter Sensor Surrogate Suite (HS3).

Fast forward now to March of 1999, when the Raider Brigade again found itself at the NTC, but this time with a much different looking reconnaissance troop.

Changes to the MTO&E had cut the scout platoons of the 1st BRT from nine trucks to six trucks, and the HS3 went back to Army Research and Development for further modification. Even more surprising, however, a Combat Observation Lasing Team (COLT) platoon had been added to the troop from 4-42 FA, the brigade's DS artillery battalion. The COLT platoon added 20 personnel, broken down into six teams and a headquarters element, along with six M1026 and one M998 HMMWVs. The new initiative married up the COLTs, whose mission it is to execute deep fires for the brigade commander, with the scouts of the 1st BRT, whose mission it is to provide "deep eyes" for the brigade commander. The new look BRT took the fight to the OPFOR at the NTC during rotation 99-05. Such an organization had never been tried before, so there were growing pains, but when the dust settled and the smoke cleared, the men of the 1st BRT had hammered out some effective TTPs, drawing from the numerous lessons learned on the sand and rocks of the Mojave.

The troop's obvious first hurdle was integrating 13Fs and 19Ds under the same guidon. The troop felt that the communications plan would be the most difficult aspect of integration, due in large part to the standard COLT procedure of operating on a direct line to the brigade fire support officer. There was a communications void between the COLT observation posts and the troop CO/TOC (actually two separate vehicles in two separate locations that provide redundant communications), which resulted in a less than perfect picture painted for the brigade commander.

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The second hurdle was deciding how to employ the newly integrated scouts and COLTs. Through trial and error during force-on-force, three distinct methods evolved. Hand in hand with the process of how to put the people on the ground is the importance of where you put them. The new design required more detailed planning for the reconnaissance and security fight, especially in regards to synchronization of fires. Another planning consideration that proved to be a shortcoming during 99-05, was the plan for battle-handoff between the BRT and the lead task force scout platoon. The BRT did an outstanding job of painting the deep picture for the brigade commander, but the picture became murkier during the transition to the close fight due to the lack of a coherent battle handoff plan.

The troop's number one concern during preparations for the March 1999 rotation was communications. During the brigade's October 1998 visit for the Leader Training Program, Brigadier General Dean Cash, then the NTC's CG, stressed that without communications, "you're just camping out." With this in mind, the 1st BRT felt the paramount task for the rotation was going to be the ability to talk to each other and to higher in the rugged terrain of the Mojave.

The real problem emerged with the internal flow of information between the COLTs and the troop CO/TOC. The flow did not come via the troop command net; the individual COLTs continued to operate almost exclusively on the brigade fire support net. The BRT counteracted the problem by co-locating the COLT headquarters vehicle with the troop CO, so the COLT platoon leader could easily update the troop commander face-to-face. The necessary measures for successful integration require that, just as scout SPOTREPs can generate a fire mission, COLT fire missions must generate SPOTREPs. The onus falls on either the COLT platoon leader or platoon sergeant to track fire missions from their individual teams, just as the scout platoon leaders track SPOTREPs, and push that information as a SPOTREP over the troop command net. Successfully accomplishing this integration refines the picture for the brigade commander.

Just as artillery shapes the battlespace by attriting, diverting, and harassing the enemy, so too can timely and accurate information. However, if that information remains on the fire support net, the brigade commander cannot leverage his assets in the most advantageous manner to shape the battlefield. The best way to overcome this is for the COLT HQ element to generate SPOTREPs from fire missions and push those SPOTREPs to the troop CO/TOC. COLTs have a very

specific mission in the execution of deep fires, but as part of a reconnaissance troop they must also understand the important edge they can provide in the fight for information dominance.

Prior to the marriage of COLTs and scouts in the 1st BRT, the responsibility of employing the COLTs fell on the brigade fire support officer. Now, since the COLT became part of the BRT, the troop commander determines the employment, based on the fires plan, with the added consideration of integrating his COLTs with his scouts. We developed three methods: scout/COLT joint OPs, scout (trigger)/COLT (observer) OPs in depth, and phased entry. The most important consideration to keep in mind when evaluating these methods is that they do not follow current doctrine. They are an attempt at establishing the foundation for new doctrine yet to be written. Obviously, with the application of these methods, there was initially some inflexibility for both scouts and COLTs. However, the soldiers of the troop overcame these feelings and placed their focus on accomplishing the mission. Throughout the force-on-force portion of the rotation, the merits and shortcomings of how to employ scouts and COLTs in the context of a reconnaissance troop came to light.

Several positive aspects are readily apparent when considering a scout/COLT joint OP. First and foremost is that the information flow problem disappears with co-location. SPOTREPs and fire missions flow from the same point. Also, with more personnel in an OP, more security is available. A third plus when considering the joint OP is the presence of superior optical capability in the form of the COLT-owned 13-power GVLLD (Ground Vehicle Lightweight Laser Designator) or the equally capable but eye-safe HGSS (Hellfire Ground Support System). The increased acquisition range when working in tandem greatly enhanced the scouts' ability to define the battlefield for the brigade commander. During 99-05, the joint OPs of the BRT positively identified enemy vehicles at ranges approaching 10,000 meters. The negative aspects of a joint scout/COLT OP include the fact that the higher number of personnel increases the signature of the OP, making it more likely to be compromised, and once compromised, both assets can be lost at the same time.

More often than not, the OPs were inserted mounted in vehicles. Current artillery branch doctrine considers a mounted insertion for COLTs as a last resort — preferring aerial insertion — and the concept of a mounted OP is completely alien. However, one of the most important lessons learned during 99-05 was the effectiveness of running a mounted OP, especially when operating jointly. The benefits include the additional security of the vehicle-mounted weapon system, as well as mobility if the position becomes compromised. Just as important, by running mounted, the OP does not depend on batteries for operation of the GVLLD/HGSS and TAS-4B, running them instead from vehicle power.

Overall, vehicle placement is the key to running a mounted OP and surviving. The more difficult it is to get into position, the better the OP. The great thing about the openness of the NTC is that the terrain makes it possible to go high to see deep. However, with the presence of enemy rotary wing, scouts and COLTs should more often than not set up short of the highest point where they are looking to emplace the OP. The 1st BRT ran a number of mounted OPs during 99-05 and enjoyed tremendous success doing so. The events of the rotation proved the viability of running mounted, especially in the joint scout/COLT concept.

The scout (trigger)/COLT (observer) OPs in depth, and phased entry were more of a reality on the dry-erase board than in actual practice at the NTC, but the lessons learned point to their feasible employment in the future. The scout (trigger)/COLT (observer) concept attempts to employ the best of both worlds as scouts initially identify the enemy and call in the trigger for fires, then the COLT OP in depth receives the handoff and observes and adjusts the rounds to complete the destruction. The obvious advantage to this method is that it provides depth through the battlespace of the reconnaissance troop, with the call for fire experts positioned accordingly to deliver the most damage. The disadvantages vary, depending on whether one or both OPs are dismounted. The strong points of a joint OP can become liabilities when the OPs become spaced over the battlefield with this method of employment. The most alluring aspect of this method, however, rests in the fact that all fire missions are done in conjunction with the scouts initiating and the COLTs finishing the job. The presence of this handoff ensures that there will be no gaps in the information flow back to higher headquarters.

The last of the three methods of scout/COLT employment finds its basis in the concept of reconnaissance pull. Considering that the brigade S-2's initial read may not always be entirely accurate, the beauty of a phased entry becomes clear. This method allows for refinement of the initial plan in the best possible way; i.e., with eyes out forward confirming or denying the situational template, and thereby "pulling" the follow-on elements into position. Two types of phased entry are possible: the scouts insert first and then, based on their read, the troop commander determines where to place the COLTs, and vice versa. The scouts would almost always look to insert on the ground, whereas the COLTs would most likely look for an aerial insertion. Of course, as with all three of the methods of employment discussed so far, METT-T drives the decision-making process. Phased entry can also incorporate the previous two methods in that once the second group inserts, they can make their way into either a joint OP or go ahead and establish OPs in depth. The bottom-line is that with phased-entry, the troop commander completes his IPB with the employment of one asset, and then once complete, he can commit his second asset to the best possible location.

Now, with an understanding of these TTPs for the employment of scouts and COLTs under the new concept of the reconnaissance troop, the focus can shift to the additional planning considerations necessary due to this new task organization. The two largest considerations that brigade planners must take into account are the added attention necessary for fires synchronization during the R&S fight, and the need for a brigade-driven battle handoff line between the reconnaissance troop and the lead task force scout platoon. The focus on getting eyes deep for the brigade commander often means that the assets of the reconnaissance troop will on average find themselves infiltrating distances of 15 to 20 kilometers ahead of the FLOT, or up to 20 to 30 kilometers away from the guns. The implications for effectively supporting them with indirect fires become apparent when considering spatial relationships and maximum effective ranges of weapons systems. During 99-05, the men of the 1st BRT effectively penetrated the OPFOR deep, only to find out, once a call for fire went up, that they had outdistanced the guns. This unfortunate realization would then result in the target dispersing or moving out while the observers waited for the guns to move up. The idea of supporting scouts and COLTs with indirect fires sounds easy enough, but the distances involved for a reconnaissance troop make the job a little more

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difficult, and nearly impossible if the planners do not account for those distances. The guns need to already be in place before that first fire mission comes across the net.

Aside from outdistancing the guns, another consideration is the need for a coherent battle handoff between the reconnaissance troop and the lead task force scout platoon. Throughout the rotation, the brigade commander always had a clear picture of how the enemy looked deep due to the presence of the BRT. However, the lead task force scout platoon often did not move up far enough or in sufficient time to receive the deep contacts as they moved forward for the close fight.

The resulting problem was that the brigade saw the enemy deep, only to lose them in the transition to the close fight. A solution to this problem needs to be that the brigade R&S order establishes a battle-handoff line for the lead task force scout platoon where they will receive the contacts from the reconnaissance troop. Of course, the line will be fairly static in the defense, whereas in the offense it will move.

The presence of a battle-handoff line necessitates that there is a lot of cross-talk between the lead task force scout platoon leader and the BRT CO/PLs. The ironic nature of what often happened at 99-05 was that the lead task force scout platoon and the lead task force TOC often eavesdropped on the reconnaissance troop command net, trying to glean the picture from the internal traffic of the troop. If the brigade order dictated a battle-handoff line, then that eavesdropping could just as easily become cross-talk, allowing for a coherent battle-handoff.

The OPFOR scouts are extremely proficient at this already, as is made apparent through the rock solid synchronization between their division and regimental reconnaissance. If BLUEFOR scouts hope to win the reconnaissance fight — which means almost guaranteed success for the close fight — they must become proficient in the battle-handoff process. The key to establishing that proficiency lies in a brigade R&S plan that forces a seamless transition from the deep to the close fight.

The decision to place the COLT platoon in the reconnaissance troop demonstrates the division's dedication to increasing lethality, survivability, and the operational tempo of its brigade "deep fight" assets. As mentioned earlier, the events of NTC 99-05 stand as the first attempt at defining the foundation upon which the Army will write the new doctrine of the brigade reconnaissance troop. The incorporation of COLTs into the brigade reconnaissance troop is logical, and the benefits become readily apparent when considering the events that transpired in the California desert during March of 1999. The men of the 1st BRT have broken new ground, and in doing so they have served to provide a glimpse of the future. As the TTPs become refined, and both scouts and COLTs become more comfortable to the new surroundings, that future appears ever more capable and utterly lethal. RECON!

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